



CANCERcare®

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# COPING WITH THE LOSS OF YOUR PARTNER OR SPOUSE

Your partner or spouse passing away is a life-changing experience. Grieving the loss of a spouse or partner is about cherishing memories of your loved one while considering new experiences that may enrich your life.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO COMFORT YOURSELF AND KEEP YOUR PARTNER OR SPOUSE ALIVE IN YOUR MIND AND HEART

**Have compassion for yourself.** The loss of a partner or spouse is a traumatic event. The moments leading up to your loss were traumatic as well. Allow yourself to feel and reflect on these moments. You may find it difficult to balance the competing memories of your partner's death and the life you shared before cancer. You may feel as though you are going through many different losses at the same time, such as:

- The loss of your loved one's personality and uniqueness
- The loss of the role he or she had in your family
- The loss of the routines that were part of your daily life
- The loss of what you imagined life to be

These feelings are a normal part of the grieving process.



**Get help with practical matters.** You may be facing practical challenges, such as mounting bills or paperwork related to your partner's death, along with new responsibilities. A family lawyer or other trusted advisor may be able to offer counsel and guidance.

**Seek support.** Surround yourself with people who acknowledge and respect the process you are going through. They may not be aware of your needs during this extremely challenging time, so let them know how they can help you. Identify those whom you can depend on for support, such as:

- Family members and friends
- A spiritual leader
- Members of a support group for people who have lost a loved one
- A social worker or other professional counselor. CancerCare offers free individual and group counseling for people who are grieving the loss of a partner or spouse.

**Give it time.** Allow yourself the time and space to grieve your loss. Give yourself permission to express your emotions and set aside time to embrace these feelings. Remember, grief is not linear and may come in waves. The intensity you may feel is a reflection of the love you shared with your partner. You may realize that in order to move forward, you need to allow yourself the time to grieve. You will not stop missing your loved one, but as time passes you may feel that your grief becomes more manageable.



**Honor your loved one.** Do something special to honor your partner's memory. For example, consider:

- Lighting a candle in remembrance of your partner
- Planting a tree or dedicating a park bench or garden in memory of your partner
- Becoming involved in a foundation or charity that was important to your partner or important to you as a couple
- Participating in an activity you enjoyed together

**Remind yourself of the good times.** Remember the happy memories you shared with one another. You can start by instilling positive images in your mind. Think about how you want to remember your

partner and how you would like others to remember him or her. This may include creating photo albums or scrapbooks; eventually these may become comforting and bring a smile to your face.

**Keep a journal.** Try to put your feelings down on paper. Reminders of your partner may come in all shapes and forms. When this happens make a note and journal about the reminder at a later time if you are not able to in that moment. When you are faced with these reminders, think about the memories or characteristics of your partner that may be attached to each reminder. Find time each day to express what you are feeling by writing in your journal. Putting your thoughts down on paper can offer a release or an outlet. To help get you get started, ask yourself:

- What reminded me of my partner today?
- Did I allow myself to embrace my emotions?
- What do I feel right now?

**Recognize your strength.** Acknowledge the challenges you and your partner faced together. This diagnosis may have made you closer as a couple. Think about what you learned about one another; think about what you learned about yourself. Recognize how you put your partner first and how grateful he or she was during this time, as well as the joy and happiness you brought to their days. The care you provided for your partner is indescribable. Continue to rely on this strength.

### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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